

The Angelic Announcement to the Shepherds

Luke 2:8-15

Introduction: Good morning! It is good to be here with you all this morning. Kiddos, why don't you go ahead and find your teachers and as they do that you adults can sit down. Let's pray for them as they go to their classes.

I am preaching today because in the middle of the week Kenner got word that his aunt passed away so he spent his week caring for his extended family and dealing with the grief that comes from loss and asked if I would take over preaching duties for today, which I am happy to do. Please keep Kenner and the family in your prayers.

This is the third week of Advent. Advent is the four weeks leading up to Christmas where we take time to reflect on the coming of Jesus. It is a season marked by waiting, longing, and anticipation where we prepare our hearts to welcome Jesus into the world once again and point our hearts to his final coming when all will be made right. This is a season where we recognize the darkness and brokenness of the world around us and the darkness and brokenness that exists in us while we await the light of Christ to come and drive out the darkness and make the brokenness whole again. This is one of the reasons that we light the advent candles every year as a symbol of the light of Christ brightening the darkness and as advent progresses so does the coming of the light. There are a few different traditions of advent candles that can be followed but today we lit the candle known as the shepherd's candle which coincides with our sermon text as the shepherds are told of Christ's birth. It is a symbol of joy at the good news of the savior who has come into the world.

In the first week of advent, we reflected on the annunciation to Mary where the angel appeared to her and told her that she would be pregnant with Jesus. What we saw there was that the method of God in saving the world is unexpected. From the unlikely recipient of a young unmarried girl from the podunk town of Nazareth, to the unnerving nature of the event of being visited by God, to the unimaginable message of a savior who would come in the form of a baby, and the unparalleled miracle of a virgin conception and birth. This is simply just not the way that any of us would naturally have planned to save the world and yet we

were invited to consider the story from Mary's perspective what it would be like to be included in God's plan to redeem the world. Noting both the disruption that happens in our lives when God visits us but the honor it is to be included in His plan and work.

Last week, we considered the arrival of Jesus or His birth and we saw that the theme of unexpected yet meaningful work continues here. We saw that God uses the perceived power of empires to his own good ends as the census to tax people was used to move Mary and Joseph to the place where the prophecy could be fulfilled of the Messiah's birth. We also saw that God often works in the obscurity of the margins and if we are going to recognize His presence we will have to look closely and listen intently. Jesus was not born in a palace or in Jerusalem but in a stable in Bethlehem. There was no pomp and circumstance just humility, love, and service. Finally, we saw that Jesus came to a place that had no space for Him so that He could make room for us in His kingdom. We were invited to consider what it means for us to make space for Christ in our hearts and to make space for other people the way that Jesus made space for us.

As you can see in the first couple weeks, Advent is a season that invites us to re-story our hearts, to recognize the nature of how God's kingdom works and the beauty of how Christ entered our world so humble and lowly to love and serve. God is a God of the margins and the ordinary and the obscure and His work is most often not glamorous or sexy but beautiful and meaningful nonetheless. Rather than striving for ideal and picturesque the story of advent is messy and real inviting us to recognize the presence of Jesus in the midst of our mess and cling to Him for life and light in the middle of our own chaos and in doing so we enter into His work of redemption and become part of this unexpected and beautiful story of darkness being made light and brokenness being made whole.

This week's passage leads us even deeper into this story and reality. This story of the angelic announcement to the shepherds while extraordinary yet again reveals to us the unexpectedly humble and meek nature of God and His work. So to help us once again enter the story let's look at just three things that show us the nature of God's work and His kingdom. First of all notice,

The salvation of Christ is available to all people, especially the obscure, despised, and ordinary.

This is in line with the rest of the story so far isn't it? Nazareth, Bethlehem, scandalous teen pregnancy, birth in a stable far from the story centering affluence and importance it centers the margins and the obscure and the story of the shepherds is no exception.

Shepherds were an interesting crew of people. Some will tell you shepherds were a despised group of men, the low end of society, dirty, dishonest, and in most ways deplorable. While I would love for that to be true to help make my point it is most likely an anachronistic imposition upon the text. This characterization of shepherds did not really enter the scene until 5th or 6th century and it is much more likely that shepherds were just ordinary members of society who did a necessary yet unremarkable task of caring for sheep and other animals. But regardless of whether they were truly despicable or just average joes the words of the angel are weighty and entrusted to at best average folks.

The point is this: salvation through Christ is available to all people but especially the ordinary folks, the despised folks, or the obscure folks. God did not choose to announce this to Roman rulers or Jewish religious elite but to shepherds. One does not need to be influential, important, knowledgeable, or affluent for the salvation of Christ to be available to you. Just as Jesus was born in obscurity to a mom who was likely despised because she was unmarried and pregnant and average father who was just a simple carpenter, so salvation is for those very same people. Of course the ones the world recognizes are also eligible but the beauty of the words of the angel and the nature of the audience of the announcement shows us that salvation has come for people of all kinds in Jesus. Salvation came from the obscurity and the margins. Jesus did not come to save people out of obscurity and the margins but salvation came from within these places.

This is how the kingdom of Heaven works, this is the meaning of incarnational ministry, that rather than the important and prominent coming to save the obscure and marginalized, salvation actually springs from obscurity and the margins. Jesus is already present there, part of it, working in it. In reality, for anyone to find salvation they must look to the humble, the meek, the poor, and

the down trodden because that is what Jesus became and that is where He is found and if you seek Him you will find him for His salvation is available to all.

You see these shepherds were just normal folks, largely unknown and unremarkable, possibly even despised. Living on the outskirts of society and yet it is to these people that the angel comes to announce the arrival of the Messiah. This is not a great pr decision and yet is authentic to the humble loving heart of God.

Let's look closer at the interaction of the angel with the shepherds to reflect more deeply on the beauty of this salvation that is offered to all who come to Christ.

The light and joy of the salvation of Christ drives out our darkness and fear.

So we have this scene where there are shepherds out in the field in the dark under the stars tending the sheep then suddenly an angel appears. This is not the angel of the Lord as seen in the OT by the way. We are not told the name of the angel we just know the angel shows up and the glory of the Lord shown around them.

Notice their initial reaction is that they were filled with fear. This makes sense on a couple of levels. First of all, it is just strange and frightening. You are doing what you always do and then bright light and an angelic being. Secondly, this pattern exists throughout all of Scripture actually. When people experience the glory of God or even the presence of a powerful angelic being they tend to feel fear and often people fall on their face.

Tim Keller made the observation that normally when in the dark it is comforting when light shows up and illuminates the darkness but not here in this story and not in all the other stories where people experience God's light and glory. ***You see we like the kind of light that illuminates the darkness around us but we fear and resist the light that illuminates the darkness within us.*** In this moment there is fear and resistance because when we come to face to face with God's glory we become immediately aware of our smallness and darkness and it is a terrifying thing to realize how not glorious you are in comparison to the truly glorious God. This is why we fear and resist truth and light and God because these things expose us and our darkness and inadequacy. To tangibly experience the glory of God is to

experience the truth about ourselves that we ignore and stuff and run from at all other times. But notice the reply of the angel when he sees the fear of the shepherds.

Fear not! For behold, I bring good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

So what is this good news? That a Savior who is the Messiah and Lord is born. The good news is that one has come to bring light to your darkness, wholeness to your brokenness, and enoughness to your inadequacies.

This good news is for all people! For regular, average joe shepherds. For the unimportant and unnoticed, for the rich foreign magicians who will soon come to see Jesus, for all people who will come to Jesus. This Savior has come for all people and will drive out the darkness.

This is wonderful news to us and the amazing thing is we simply need to behold Jesus, behold the savior who is born and as you behold him rather than beholding your own darkness the joy of salvation in Jesus drives out the fear and darkness that exists in all of us.

This is the joy of Christmas! That the light of God has come in Jesus and He is driving out the darkness and fear in our hearts and in this world.

Interestingly enough the angel goes on to tell them the sign they should look for to see this Savior who has brought light and joy. He tells them they will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. Now there is all kinds of nerdy things going on here I just want to point out a couple.

First of all, imagine how strange this would be that the savior king is a baby and he is chilling in a feeding trough wrapped in swaddling clothes. But how appropriate it is for the Bread of Life who will feed the souls of all who come to him hungry is there lying in the feeding trough? And secondly, it is likely that these shepherds were tasked with taking care of the lambs for Passover that they would inspect and wrap in swaddling clothes to keep warm and safe so they could be used as an acceptable sacrifice, and here is the spotless Passover lamb wrapped in swaddling

clothes being kept safe and warm until he is the sufficient sacrifice once and for all. Beautiful imagery and storytelling.

As the angel finishes speaking a host of heavenly beings fills the sky and says glory to God in the highest and on earth peace for those on whom His favor rests. You see...

The salvation of Christ creates praise in Heaven and peace for God's people.

This is an incredible scene one we will have time to reflect on tonight if you come back for the reflection service. But God pulls back the veil between Heaven and earth for these shepherds and they see the response of the spiritual realm to the good news of Christ's salvation. The redeeming work of God on earth creates praise in Heaven but they go on to say something really interesting. Peace on earth among those with whom He is pleased. Well, that sounds nice but what does it mean?

It does not mean political peace or the absence of war. It does not mean you will have relational peace with people all the time either. Listen to Jesus' words in Luke 12:51-53.

⁵¹ Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. ⁵² For from now on in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three. ⁵³ They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law."¹

That does not sound peaceful does it? So what does it mean? Peace on earth means peace now not just later at Christ's return for God's people. What is happening here is that those who look to Jesus to save them are given peace with God. There is peace between God and those with whom He is pleased. God is well pleased in His Son and those who are in Christ are living at peace with God as ones with whom He is pleased.

¹ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Lk 12:51–53.

This peace with God exists because of Jesus and it actually is the basis for the reason that we can be peacemakers as we are to be but also the basis from which we can also experience the peace of God which transcends all understanding.

Peace with God opens the door for experiencing the peace and comfort of God.

The security that comes from being at peace with God is the foundation from which we are able to interact with people and a world that are constantly at war with themselves and each other. If we have peace with God then we can humbly love others and seek peace with them because nothing they have done or can do can take the peace with God that Jesus has given you.

The salvation of Christ creates praise in Heaven but also peace on earth for God's people.

The last verse of our passage today shows the shepherds response to this news. They immediately decide that they will go and see about this Savior whom God revealed to them.

Is this not the invitation of advent? That we would come and see about this savior who is Christ the Lord? That we would come and inquire? That we might come and behold him?

Will you come and behold Him? Allowing His light and life to produce joy in you and drive out your darkness and fear?

Because of Jesus we have peace with God and He is pleased with us because of His Son. We are free now to worship along with the heavenlies and free to make peace here on earth and live at peace with ourselves and those around us because there is peace between us and God.

Will you do as the shepherds did? Will you come and see about this Savior who came to us? Come and behold and worship Him and receive His joy and peace.

Conclusion: All who come to Christ will experience the joy and peace of salvation in Him.